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Breaking Silence: A Single Case Study on the Lived Experiences of an Abused Man

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ABSTRACT

Men are often perceived as embodying traditional masculine ideals, characterized by attributes such as strength and bravery, leading to a downplay of their experiences of abuse and struggle to come forward and seek help. This study was conducted to create a space where they lived experiences of an abused man can be genuinely expressed, heard, acknowledged, and understood. A qualitative single case study design was utilized, focusing on a purposively chosen male participant who experienced abuse within his marriage. Data was collected through an in-depth, semi-structured interview and analyzed using narrative analysis, incorporating thematic, structural, and dialogic approaches to understand both the content and meaning of the participant's narrative. The findings revealed five major themes: initiation of abuse, escalation of abuse, factors that sustained and expanded the abuse, personal and psychological impact, and relational and systemic insights. The results indicate that abuse is a gradual and multidimensional process influenced by power imbalance, societal expectations, and psychological adaptation. The study concludes that male victims experience significant emotional and psychological distress but often remain silent due to stigma, gender expectations, and limited institutional support. It emphasizes the need for increased awareness, gender-inclusive policies, and responsive intervention programs that recognize and support male victims of abuse. Lawmakers should create a gender-neutral law for domestic violence. While social service providers should ensure that domestic violence interventions and legal protections are accessible to all victims, regardless of gender.

Keywords: Male Victimization; Domestic Abuse; Masculinity; Coercive Control; Societal Expectation; Social Stigma; Silenced Culture; Adaptation; Gender-Inclusive Policy; Resilience.

1.0. Introduction

The concept of the masculine norms delineates expectations of men's emotional and physical resilience while discouraging vulnerability [1,2]. Men navigate between traditional expectations and modern emotional influences, leading to a struggle with vulnerability that manifests as anxiety, making it hard for men to foster healthier boundaries in relationships [3, 4]. Despite societal mandates, men remain inherently human and experience a wide range of emotions, enabling men to experience a sense of belonging and self-worth [5]. However, love's intensity can lead to harm and violence, which might occur not only in external environments, but also lurked and existed in the very place we consider safe – our home. Domestic violence is more than just a question of anger or dispute where scholars have described it as a grave problem that occurs behind closed doors in many homes, often with impunity, designed to exert power and control over another person [6, 7].

Nonetheless, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), men too can become victims of domestic violence because of the socioeconomic changes and pressure that have affected the family structures in recent times, creating a rise in female-perpetrated abuse [8]. Today, this covers a broad range of violent acts, among them are psychological violence, such as insults and humiliation, and the most severe forms of violence were physical and sexual [9,10]. Beyond the act itself, culture though sustains male dominance, it effectively shackles men who cannot meet the standard to a profound culture of silence and a consequence of inflexible gender hierarchy, leading them to downplay their experiences of abuse and struggle to come forward and seek help as they still frequently

experience misidentification and secondary victimization, often perceived as perpetrators by the police and support services, with some experiencing antagonistic responses resulting in fear of arrest [11, 12]. Facing the tide of recognition and experiencing cognitive dissonance contributes to men's reluctance to pursue legal actions or seek assistance, leading to abuse frequently going underreported as these issues are often perceived as a sign of weakness [13, 14, 15].

In the Philippines, research on male victims of abuse is still narrowly focused, and the discussion of this societal issue tends to highlight the experiences of women victims, reflecting the patriarchal kind of society. Considering the prevailing cultural and societal norms that often silence male victims and reinforce restrictive gender roles, this research seeks to break down the prevalent dominant perceptions of masculinity and shed light on the often-invisible realities of violence against men, exploring how a male victim constructed and articulated his experiences, how the abuse affected his sense of identity, and how he navigated the stigma associated with victimhood.

1.1. Study Objectives

This study explored the lived experiences of an abused man within intimate relationships and will address the following key questions:

1) How does a male victim of abuse experience (include form), interpret, and cope with abuse within his personal, social, and emotional contexts?
2) What are the underlying factors that cause abusive experiences to sustain, intensify, and expand over time?
3) How does the victim interpret, rationalize, and cope with abuse amidst societal expectations?
4) How has abuse affected his personal relationships, daily functioning, and long-term well-being?
5) What insights can be drawn from his story that can inform support services for male victims of abuse?

2.0. Literature Review

Men are often perceived as embodying traditional masculine ideals, characterized by strength and bravery. This societal expectation was exemplified in Shakespeare's "Hamlet", where Hamlet's father is depicted as a powerful warrior. Despite societal mandates, men remain inherently human and experience a wide range of emotions. Love and relationships make a man experience a sense of belonging and self-worth [5]. Whereas, home and family, apart from providing security and emotional support, should be the one to provide the most secure environment for an individual to grow [16]. It should provide individuals with rest, peace, quiet, comfort, health, and a degree of personal expression, as well as a place of enjoyment and beautiful reinforcement of the spirit for adults [17]. This domestic violence and abuse are a highly frequent violation of human rights, damaging the health and the well-being of victims and survivors [18]. Literature highlights that is a predominantly hidden frequently transpire without with lack of accountability [6].

With the current changes in status, relationships that should promote growth between the partners can become an environment of control and violence whose physical and psychological consequences are not only for women but

also for men [19]. Today, domestic violence against men covers a broad range of violent acts reflecting the harsh reality that women are also perpetrators and active participants in its commission [20], with men reporting their experiences of a range of abuses. In one study, it revealed the existence of this kind of abuse committed against men, where 33% of the husbands reported having experienced some form of emotional, financial, and even physical abuse. Emotional abuse is the most prevalent form of domestic violence against husbands, with a mean of 2.54, while sexual abuse is the least committed against them with a mean of only 2.06 [21]. Furthermore, in a society where the man's image is highly expected, it was revealed that confidentiality concerns, shame and embarrassment, and financial constraints were the primary barriers to seeking help [22]. The pervasiveness, nature, and consequences of abuse against men in the country are characterized by indications of forced obedience, economic deprivation, controlled emotion, and abusive language, which are not expressed due to preservation of the macho image, absence of law to support claims, and pride [23].

3.0. Materials and Methods

This qualitative research employed a single case study design that involved an in-depth exploration of complex issues and experiences in real life. It aimed to capture and explored the uniqueness and complexity of one man's experiences of abuse within his marriage, with interviews conducted to gather the necessary data. This study was conducted in Bukidnon, a province in Northern Mindanao. The Province of Bukidnon is located in the center of Mindanao Island, in the southern Philippines.

The participant in this study was a man who had experienced abuse within his marriage. A purposive sampling method is used to identify the participants based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) married for more than 5 years, (2) may or may not have children, (3) employed either full-time, part-time, or self-employed, and (4) has sought psychological consultation.

The researcher utilized interview guide questions to obtain information from the participant. To elicit participants' more detailed narratives during the in-depth interview, the researcher used open-ended questions, which were translated into the local language to facilitate greater comprehension and intercommunication. It contained an introduction, an explanation, an opening question, the main question, and a concluding question. While ethical consideration was strictly observed, obtaining informed consent from the participant with anonymity and confidentiality maintained in accordance with Republic Act 10173.

This study adopted Catherine Kohler Riessman's narrative analysis framework to examine the lived experience of a male victim of abuse. Narrative analysis emphasizes how individuals construct meaning through storytelling (Sparkes & Smith, 2023). This analysis explored and ascribed meaning through interpretation, moving beyond the literal words of the stories. Rather than treating data as objective facts to be coded, narrative analysis views stories as performances shaped by context, identity, and audience. Data were drawn from a single in-depth, open-ended interview that invited the participant to share his experience of abuse, silence, and disclosure. The analysis proceeded through three interrelated modes: Thematic Analysis, Structural Analysis, and Dialogic/Performative Analysis.

4.0. Results and Discussion

The qualitative analysis of the participant's narrative revealed the trajectory of male victimization, which includes Initiation of Abuse, Escalation of Abuse, Factors Sustaining the Abuse, Personal and Psychological Impact, and Relational and Systemic Insights. The following themes illustrate the transition from subtle coercive control to systemic dominance and eventually resilience.

4.1. Initiation of Abuse

The experienced abuse was characterized by a subtle onset rather than a discrete and abrupt event, initially disguised as normal relational conflict. The participant observed the early indicators of coercive dominance, irritability, and physical aggression during the nascent days of the relationship. A systematic control and the incremental curtailment of self-independence further substantiated this pattern of control.

By showing his wife patience, understanding, and tolerance, he unintentionally created space for power to consolidate. This control did not arrive suddenly; it quietly and gradually settled into daily interactions until it felt normal. The participant described this as,

"*Even when we were still dating, she was already aggressive…*"

"I just ignored it."

"It is like she had me under her control."

These remarks suggest the early establishment of coercive influence, with power imbalance slowly building, and compliance became a strategy to avoid escalation. This clearly demonstrated that his tolerance allowed coercive behaviors to become embedded in the relationship dynamics. This was also noticed by his older sister, saying,

"I told him that it'll really get worse because he keeps allowing it, and it turned out, I was right."

The submission served as a coping strategy aimed at preventing escalation before it became physical; it had first become acceptable.

The aggression and abuse existed, but were silenced, and rather than interpreting these behaviors as warning signs, they align with research confirming men ignore red flags to maintain fragile peace and the submission not because of agreement, but to maintain temporary peace [16, 17]. The participant reflected on them as a common couple conflict as well because men frequently reframed abuse as ordinary couple tensions to avoid the stigma, which was perceived as a sign of weakness [24]. He chose peace over confrontation and convinced himself that endurance was maturity and that acceptance was love.

Amidst all this was someone who convinced himself that the problems in their relationship were his shortcomings. Self-blame is the most common emotional response among victims of abuse in a relationship, especially if the abuse was refined and subtle. In his moment of reflection, he would say,

"At first, it did not really matter to me, and I did not think it was already a form of abuse,"

"*After all, that was also my mistake*".

His acceptance, taking responsibility for the conflict, and taking the blame contributed to a gradual and delayed realization that the relationship had become controlling and abusive. This is also noted by his friend, saying,

"We keep telling him whenever we notice something, even before marriage, but he will just respond that she is just tired or stressed, and would say, just to leave her be."

This very approach of the participant to protect his relationship with his wife has cost him his sense of security and well-being.

This further confirms the study that myths about ideal romance are the primary predictor of emotional dependence, which explains why your participant convinced himself that acceptance was the only path [25]. It led to male victims often struggling to label themselves as abused because victimhood conflicts with masculine identity. Admitting harm may feel like admitting weakness [26, 27].

The participant's narrative displays that early abuse is frequently concealed, not due to a lack of warning signs, but quietly develops within everyday interactions. This also revealed how factors such as coercive control, learned helplessness, and gender identity work together to postpone awareness, enabling the abuse to become deeply rooted. Recognizing these dynamics is necessary for preventing the normalization of abuse and for promoting healthier, more respectful relationships, and seeking help without fear of stigma or judgment.

4.2. Escalation of Abuse

The participant's story illustrates how abuse gradually intensified as the relationship progressed, marking the transition of situational conflict to systemic abuse, reflecting the dynamic nature of coercive control. His body, dignity, and financial independence became targets of abuse. As the abuse intensifies, the participant's resistance diminishes. The slow escalation made the victim psychologically exhausted by the time the violence became life-threatening, effectively confining him within the harsh realities of his situation.

Over time, the participant was no longer facing isolated incidents but a repeated pattern of bodily harm that placed his safety at risk. Participant described the physical violence progress as,

"*What started as slaps eventually became full punches,"*

"She would slap, punch, kick, bite."

"There was really a time when she came at me with a knife",

It showed how abuse intensifies from minor aggression to life threat. Furthermore, this pattern was evident: even the night before the wedding, his sister asked,

"I told him, 'Are you really sure you want to get married? '" Even now, he already slammed you against the wall—what more when you are already married? Do not think about the money we have spent on the wedding. Ever since, he has been hitting him so easily."

The abuse experienced was not limited to physical harm but extends to psychological and emotional violence. The verbal attack that was a private abuse has turned into public degradation. These humiliating actions took away the participant's respect and made the abuser feel more powerful. The participant recalls,

"*She would scold me even in front of other people,"*

"She was not ashamed to call me 'stupid,"

This public insult has reshaped how the participant looks at himself, saying,

"What was I supposed to be? A piece of wood?"

It challenged his confidence and reinforced the feelings of not being enough, of being a nobody. His friend would recount,

"Even when we dine out, and he orders something she does not like, she will insult him right there, right then, right in front of us. However, he did nothing to defend himself."

Her aunt, on the other hand, recalls that they once stayed in a high-end hotel in Davao, while the participant stayed in a low-budget hotel.

"When we were in Davao to buy stocks for her shop, his simple disagreement over where to sleep led him to sleep in an inn, while we stayed in the high-end hotel as if he were not the husband at all."

Another form of abuse experienced by the participant involved economic control. In his narrative, the participant described how his financial authority was taken away. By controlling the household finances and making financial decisions without the participant's consent, the wife limited his independence and ability to meet even his basic needs.

"She was the one handling our money."

"I could not even buy underwear and had to ask my mother to buy me one."

Aside from everything, the participant's wife has to pre-approve everything, while decisions regarding property and money are made solely by the wife, while accumulating debt in the victim's name.

"My vehicle is gone because she used it as collateral."

Economic abuse became another method through which the wife was able to maintain dominance in the relationship. The participant's trust to hand over the financial control to his wife was opposed by his sibling,

"*Because it is really not okay that he does not have his own money. Look, even when he buys briefs, he still asks his mother for money, and when he has trips, he messages me to ask for allowance. Then all the money he earns, he gives entirely to …"*

When this form of power is repeatedly exercised without resistance, it gradually strengthens the abuser's sense of control and authority in the relationship [28]. The victim, on the other hand, became increasingly hesitant to challenge the abusive behavior, often due to fear, emotional pressure, or social expectations [29]. The emotional abuse, on the other hand, can be as damaging as it erodes the victim's self-esteem and psychological well-being

[30]. Whereas the economic abuse controlled a survivor's ability to acquire, use, and maintain resources, which can lead to financial dependence and limit their ability to leave the relationship [31]. It became a factor that ties victims to an abuser [32].

These findings significantly exposed that abuse did not occur in a single form. Physical violence, verbal degradation, and financial control worked together to create a system of domination, a structured pattern of control that gradually infiltrates every aspect of a victim's life. Upon documenting this shift, the study provides a critical counter-narrative for societal masculine expectations, proving that a man endured due to learned helplessness and shame-based entrapment rather than lack of strength.

4.3. Factors That Sustained and Expanded the Abuse

The painful truth about how the abuse continues when the victim feels powerless and unsupported made him stay in the relationship due to fear of reprisal, social stigma, and the barriers that make reporting difficult. This was intensified by the cultural expectation that a man possessed qualities such as bravery and strength, not vulnerability, which made him incapable of defending himself. It is a trap of culture that equates masculinity with invulnerability.

He actually feared that seeking help or defending himself might result in legal consequences against him rather than against his wife. This is because he sees the law addressing violence as protection of women; he then believed that the authorities might assume he was the aggressor, that the wife's actions were just a response. His fear of the legal outcomes and how the actual incidents were overturned was evident in his statements,

"I was scared I would end up being charged under VAWC,"

"One time she pushed into the dining table, and when I pushed her back, the very next day, she was the one who filed a blotter."

Even though he was the victim of abuse, the participant felt exposed to legal and social misinterpretations of the situation, as a result,

"I ended up being seen as the one at fault."

His encounter with the law enforcement agency confirmed what he feared the most. His legal concern was also a concern of his sister,

"It's really difficult because it's usually the woman who is favored by the law, but what about the man? People asked, 'How strong can a woman really be?' That's just the kind of mentality people have."

This shows the frustration over the double standard on domestic abuse, where the traditional roles of aggressor and victim are always the picture.

Another factor that sustained the abuse was the participant's coping strategy of avoiding confrontation and enduring the situation to maintain peace. Instead of resisting or challenging the abusive behavior, he chose to minimize the conflict by agreeing with his partner or ignoring harmful actions.

This coping mechanism temporarily reduced immediate conflict but ultimately allowed the abusive behavior to continue. He described his response and coping behavior with,

"I just laughed it off."

"I always said yes,"

"I ignored everything so the problem would not get bigger."

These responses show how the participant attempted to maintain peace by suppressing his reactions and avoiding confrontation. His buddy and aunt also commented on the participant's avoidance of conflict, saying,

"He just keeps complaining but still does not do anything about it."

"He continues to rant but then decides not to continue because he claims he is exhausted and might as well just leave it alone," respectively.

This aligns with the belief that love requires unconditional, self-sacrificing love – Agape [33]. The fear that institutional and legal frameworks will be used against them, deepening their sense of isolation [34]. It eventually developed a sense of powerlessness, believing that their actions cannot change the outcome [35]. The idea that love conquers all leads individuals to believe that sacrifice and endurance are essential to a committed relationship [36].

These showed the legal imbalance, and the romantic myth created the unique state of paralysis for the male victim and revealed that for men, the legal system of the country is perceived as a secondary source of victimization that silenced the cries for help instead of being a refuge. Furthermore, it shows that avoidance and endurance were not only signs of weakness but a strategic choice for survival. This challenges the social masculine expectations that often ignore the male as a victim and highlights the problem of how domestic abuse of men is handled, showing men are forced to choose between physical safety and their legal and social survival.

4.4. Personal and Psychological Impact

Being victimized caused internal conflict between a man's lived experience and his socially constructed masculine identity because men are often socialized to view themselves as strong, dominant, and emotionally resilient. The participant's narrative exemplifies how sustained abuse can adversely impact psychological well-being and concurrently induce enduring transformations in personal identity and relational patterns well beyond the termination of the abusive relationship.

One of the most significant effects of the abuse was the participant's struggle with his sense of masculinity. Cultural expectations often portray men as dominant, strong, and emotionally tough in relationships. However, his experiences went against these stereotypes, leading to inner conflict about what it meant to be a man. Instead of seeing himself as a victim, he started questioning whether he had failed to live up to the role of a husband. The participant conveyed his internal struggle through statements such as,

"A wife should submit to her husband—but in our case, it was the opposite."

"Maybe I wasn't man enough,"

This powerfully illustrates how the trauma of abuse led him to internalize his situation and suffering as personal weakness rather than acknowledging himself as a victim. The participant's doubts became apparent to others, such as his friend, after he was abandoned by his wife, stating,

"*He believed that he should have been a better husband at the beginning of the relationship, that it could not have ended in such a way."*

However, his reflections suggest that the abuse left unresolved emotional scars, which manifested in moments of withdrawal, dark thoughts, and lingering anger. As the participant narrates,

"I would suddenly just stare blankly"

These moments indicated emotional withdrawal or mental disengagement. Reactions that are often linked to feeling mentally exhausted or overwhelmed, especially when someone is dealing with ongoing stress or trauma. It is a way for the mind to temporarily detach and give itself a break from emotional overload.

Similarly, the participant's reference to

"*You get those dark thoughts, suicidal thoughts…"*

"I want revenge first before I can rest,"

The presence of intrusive and distressing patterns suggested that it developed after repeated exposure to conflict, humiliation, or aggression because of the feelings of despair, anger, or helplessness that accumulated, impacting emotional stability and mental health. This became the reason why the participant's sister did pursue that he seeks professional help,

"*We* are *getting scared because he just stares blankly, and he still will not talk about what he is really feeling. We are worried he might lose his mind."*

The victim is caught between two irreconcilable truths: being in control and being abused. When these two ideas cannot be merged, it creates a mental breaking point.

As he tried to go on with his life, the participant felt the need for more stringent boundaries and frequent updates, which is indicative of a protective reaction molded by traumatic experiences. These changes show how unresolved emotional pain can affect future relational dynamics, even though they may also be self-defense mechanisms.

The participant explained that the experience significantly influenced how he approached relationships afterward and became more cautious, with a greater need for control and reassurance, rather than viewing relationships with the same openness and trust as before. His statement,

"Now, I want constant updates."

"I have become stricter now,"

"The pain I went through really changed me,"

A greater need for security and openness was pointed out, an effort to prevent circumstances that could cause emotional harm again, which became a coping strategy he used to try to maintain more control over relationships

and set clearer boundaries. He says that actions show how past trauma can affect perceptions of trust, communication, and relational expectations, even though they may also be self-defense mechanisms. That is what caused him in his new relationship to break up.

"He is extremely suffocating and demanding, though I am really trying to understand. Even eating alone becomes so difficult to do - he is full of doubts."

By questioning his performance as a husband rather than identifying as a victim, the participant demonstrates the Masculine Gender Role Stress [37]. This inner struggle highlights how powerful societal ideas can cause an identity crisis, especially since male vulnerability is often stigmatized or misunderstood [38]. It inadvertently surrenders his situation, the abuser gains coercive control, and the victim's self-efficacy begins to collapse [39]. Moreover, frequently suffer from intrusive thoughts, re-experiencing the humiliation and violence in their minds, and significantly impaired mental health, often resulting in enduring emotional and psychological sequelae that persist beyond the cessation of the abusive relationship [41]. Then, by actively setting new terms, the participant is moving from a passive state of trauma-induced silence to an active state of agency, a core component of multisystemic resilience [42].

The theme reveals that the end of the relationship is just the beginning of a complex internal and external struggle for a male victim of abuse. This study proves that abuse causes a long-term psychological pattern that can interfere with a man's attempt at love and happiness because of a collapsed masculine identity and relational paranoia. It highlights that male recovery is uniquely hindered by a mental breaking point where societal pressure to be strong clashes with the reality of trauma.

4.5. Relational and Systemic Insights

The participant's narrative acknowledged the role of family support, perceived limitations in legal protections for male victims, and the importance of awareness and boundary-setting in interpersonal relationships, and how it shaped his coping mechanisms and perceptions of the abuse. While some of his relationships became sources of strength, he still found it difficult to discuss his circumstances openly due to external factors, which complicated his ability to seek support and process his experience honestly.

Despite the difficulties he endured, the participant emphasized that his family remained a constant source of support throughout his ordeal. His experience illustrates how supportive relationships can act as protective factors during times he felt powerless and overwhelmed, providing stability and encouragement when he felt powerless within his relationship. The actions of the participant's wife ultimately led to misunderstandings and detachment within his family, imposing a financial burden on them and compelling him to remain a spouse despite his circumstances.

"It is just foolish that he is letting himself suffer so much—and we are getting dragged into it too, especially financially. Everything's becoming chaotic because our mother wants to support him, while I personally think they should just separate. It's like a 'you and me against the world' kind of situation."

"They never left me, even with everything I have put them through,"

"*They were with me during legal consultations with our conjugal property and steps against her and the other man.*"

These remarks demonstrate how the participant relied on his family's presence and encouragement as he navigated emotionally and legally complex circumstances. Their willingness to accompany him during legal consultations indicates that their support extended beyond emotional reassurance to an active involvement in helping him address the situation and seek possible solutions.

Another key insight from the participant's narrative is his perception that current legal protections mainly focus on female victims, which leaves him feeling unsure about whether he would receive the same level of support. His perception raises hesitation and feelings of embarrassment when considering formal reporting of abuse. The participant candidly expressed a sense of exclusion and frustration regarding legal protection, remarking that

"Maybe if there were a law that also protects us men,"

"For a man, it's embarrassing to file a blotter."

These reflections reveal how he perceives both the legal system and societal attitudes as discouraging male victims from seeking help. His words suggest that the absence of clear legal safeguards for men, combined with cultural expectations of masculinity, can create feelings of invisibility, shame, and reluctance to report abuse. These were seconded by his friend, mentioning,

"There's VAWC law, but for men, it's just physical injury or what else? threat or coercion cases—but it's really hard for a man to prove that he is the victim and wasn't the one who started it."

Thus, filing a complaint or seeking protection may be seen not only as legally daunting but also socially embarrassing, reinforcing a cycle of silence and endurance. This view turns asking for assistance into a double threat of the embarrassment of not living up to masculine expectations of power and the possibility of being disregarded by authorities.

Looking back on his experience, the participant offered advice based on what he has learned over time. He emphasized the importance of really getting to know your partner before marriage and of setting personal boundaries early in a relationship. He now recognizes that taking the time to truly understand a partner before making a long-term commitment is crucial, and that avoiding conflict should never come at the expense of one's own well-being and respect. The participant's realization is distilled into these pieces of advice:

"Before you get married, really take time to know your partner."

"Do not let yourself be mistreated just to avoid conflict."

These statements clearly show how his personal experience has profoundly shaped his perspective on the importance of awareness in relationships and of establishing strong personal boundaries. These are his hard-earned lessons and reflect a deep understanding of how relationships can become harmful if these principles are ignored.

This support system played an important role in helping the participant endure the challenges and maintain emotional resilience during a particularly vulnerable time in life [43]. Knowing that his family remained by his side

likely alleviated some burdens, reduced feelings of helplessness, and provided him with the courage to face the situation [44]. His reflections emphasize how societal assumptions about gender roles can shape how individuals experiencing abuse interpret and navigate legal systems, and concerns about social judgment and the belief that men are not typically seen as victims added an extra barrier to seeking protection and help [45]. It further supports that men reported experiencing feelings of shame and embarrassment for not aligning with societal norms of masculinity, which decreased their chances of recognizing their victimization or reaching out for assistance [46]. It emphasizes that survivors view their past tolerance not as a weakness, but as a lack of boundaries that they now prioritize [47].

Generally, the results indicate that abuse within intimate relationships often develops gradually, starting with subtle behaviors that are often seen as normal or dismissed as everyday conflicts. In the participant's experience, early warning signs such as controlling behavior, verbal hostility, and minor acts of aggression were tolerated, which allowed the coercive control to take place and intensify over time. Psychological responses like self-blame and delayed awareness, combined with societal expectations of masculinity, made it harder for him to recognize the situation as abuse. These insights underscore the importance of raising awareness about non-physical forms of abuse and educating people on early warning signs, healthy boundaries, and respectful relationship practices.

Additionally, it highlights the crucial role of relational and institutional support systems in addressing abuse. The participant's story demonstrates how family support provided emotional comfort and helped bolster his resilience during difficult times. However, his perception that legal protections mainly focus on female victims led to hesitation and feelings of shame when considering seeking formal help. This points to the need for more inclusive, gender-sensitive policies and support services, along with public awareness campaigns that acknowledge abuse can happen to anyone regardless of gender. Such efforts can encourage victims to seek help without fear of stigma or judgment.

5.0. Conclusion

This single case study explored the lived experiences of a male victim of abuse in marriage. Through the analysis of interview statements, five key themes emerged: Initiation of Abuse, Escalation of Abuse, Factors That Sustained and Expanded the Abuse, Personal and Psychological Impact, and Relational and Systemic Insights.

The study revealed that male victimization is a gradual process where subtle aggression is often minimized as normal relational conflict, leading to delayed recognition and eventually escalation into severe physical, emotional, and economic abuse. The expansion of abuse was influenced by the normalization of early red flags, allowing coercive control to be rooted in the guise of ordinary conflict. Over time, this psychological adaptation and social barriers, including the masculine stereotypes and legal fear of misinterpretation, created a cycle of powerlessness and silence that progressively intensifies the belief that resistance may worsen the situation. This prolonged abuse severely impacts psychological well-being and identity, causing emotional distress, intrusive thoughts, anger, and conflict with masculine identity that leads to a more cautious and guarded approach in future relationships. However, despite these challenges, strong family support helped build resilience and assisted in coping with their

effects. Furthermore, there is a lack of an inclusive support system and public awareness to pull apart the masculine stereotypes that hinder male victims from seeking help, and the need for expanding gender-inclusive legal protections, trauma-informed counseling, and relational education for promoting early recognition and prevention of intimate partner violence against men.

6.0. Recommendations

- To the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and Local Government Unit (LGU) City and Municipal Social Welfare and Development (LGU-CSWD), may launch inclusive awareness campaigns that explicitly recognize male victimization in intimate partner abuse during barangay assemblies and family development sessions.
- To the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Department of Education (DepEd), and Commission on Population and Development (POPCOM), may embed a healthy relationship module in the personal development subject, including male victimization and boundary setting in pre-marriage orientation and counseling.
- To the Department of Health (DOH), the Philippine Mental Health Association (PMHA), and the Psychological Association of the Philippines (PAP) may develop and implement gender-inclusive, trauma-informed psychological protocols specifically designed for male victims through the creation of counseling programs that address the unique identity conflicts, emotional numbness, and masculine stress.
- To the Department of Justice (DOJ), Philippine National Police (PNP), / Public Attorney's Office (PAO), and Congress, may institutionalize gender-inclusive legal protections and support systems by refining domestic violence laws to include male victims, and implementing specialized training for officers and public attorneys in handling male victimization

Declarations

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The author has not declared any conflict of interest.

Consent for publication

The author declares that she consented to the publication of this study.

Consent to participate

The participant in this study voluntarily gave his informed consent before their involvement in the research.

Authors' contributions

The author took part in literature review, analysis, and manuscript writing.

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